

Exploring Media Use and Perceptions of Swedish News Media Among Immigrants During the Election Campaign 2018

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Abstract

In democratic societies, news media play a key role – not least during election campaigns – as a central source of political information and forum for public debate. This makes it crucial to understand how and why people use and perceive news media. This includes immigrants. Despite the fact that immigrants constitute a relatively large group, and indications that immigrants and the Swedish majority population differ in ways that might have societal implications, there is however limited research on media use and media perceptions among immigrants in Sweden. To help remedy this, the aim of the current study is to explore how immigrants used and perceived Swedish news media during the election campaign 2018. Findings from focus group data display a great deal of variation regarding characteristics and motivations for media use. Further, four different trust dimensions that participants evaluated, and based their perceptions of news media on, are identified.

In democratic societies, news media play a key role – not least during election campaigns – as a central source of political information and forum for public debate (Schröder 2016). For example, evidence suggests that use of news media is associated with political knowledge, interest, participation and trust (Curran et al. 2014; Norris 2000; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2018; Strömbäck & Shehata 2010).

In the context of migration, media use is also often viewed as a tool for integration and a way of learning about the host society (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Horsti 2008). On the other hand, news media might also discourage identification with public life since the views of elites tend to be overrepresented while other groups tend to be marginalized (Curran et al. 2014). Arguably, immigrants

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might be especially likely to experience a lack of identification since they are underrepresented in news media as well as within political parties; in addition, research shows that immigrants and immigration are often negatively framed in the news (Dancygier et al. 2015; Eberl et al. 2018; Strömbäck et al. 2017).

Against this background, a relevant research question is how immigrants in Sweden used and perceived media during the election campaign 2018. This is relevant for at least three reasons. First, we have limited knowledge about the *motivations* for media use (or non-use) and the *roots* for different perceptions of Swedish news media among immigrants. This holds true even though one-sixth of the Swedish population consists of immigrants (SCB 2018). Over one million of them are Swedish citizens (SCB 2017a), and in addition over half a million foreign citizens were entitled to vote in the local elections 2018 (SCB 2017b). Second, research indicates that immigrants and the Swedish majority population differ in ways that might have societal implications. For instance, findings suggest that immigrants use somewhat less Swedish media (Andersson 2005; Weibull & Wadbring 1998) and that they find it more difficult to understand (Annerstedt, Bergström & Ohlsson 2017). Yet, previous research about how immigrants relate to media is mainly descriptive in character, while there are hardly no Swedish studies that explore immigrants' motivations for media use or perceptions of news media. Third, as noted above, immigrants tend to be underrepresented and negatively framed in the news (Brune 2004; Eberl et al. 2018), and international research indicates that immigrants perceive themselves as excluded and negatively presented in media (Christiansen 2004). That might reinforce feelings of exclusion from the host society, which in turn might trigger tensions between immigrants and the majority population.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this study is to explore media use and perceptions of Swedish news media among immigrants during the election campaign 2018. Empirically, the study builds on data from focus groups conducted in the midst of the election campaign.

News Media Use Among Immigrants

Research suggests that immigrants tend to use media from their countries of origin as well as international media and media content in their native language (Andersson 2005; Christiansen 2004; Kissau 2012). This has been claimed to result in lack of interest in the host society and decreased integration (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). Yet, this claim has also been questioned, and evidence from the Nordic countries suggests that use of media outlets from other countries and in other languages seems to complement rather than replace use of media from the host country (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008; Weibull & Wadbring 1998). Specifically, research suggests that immigrants tend to seek news media – from the host country *and* from international outlets – very

broadly, and their news diet often include a mix of radio, television, newspapers and the Internet. In fact, evidence indicates that immigrants in total seek news through more different outlets and spend more time on obtaining news than the majority population (Christiansen 2004). This finding has been explained by difficulties in finding a single news outlet that can fulfil immigrants' various needs related to their transnational situation (Christiansen 2004).

At the same time, survey-based studies from Sweden indicate that immigrants use Swedish media slightly less than people born in Sweden, especially when it comes to use of broadsheets and radio news (Andersson 2005; Weibull & Wadbring 1998). Findings from Sweden also shows that immigrants, compared to Swedes, find it more difficult to read Swedish news texts and to understand Swedish TV and radio news (Annerstedt, Bergström & Ohlsson 2017).

In terms of motivations for media use, previous research has identified several key motivations. These include to stay updated on local and national events (in the home countries as well as in the host country), that media use is a part of an ongoing identity work, and that media use constitutes an efficient way of learning a new language (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Sjöberg & Rydin 2011). At the same time, research shows that news use and interest in political issues in the host country are likely to vary among immigrants, depending on factors such as language skills, self-esteem and social capital (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008).

Despite the fact that there is some research about media use among immigrants, our knowledge about how immigrants in Sweden use news media is very limited. Further, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have been conducted in the context of an ongoing election campaign, when the role of news media can be considered especially important from a democratic perspective. To help remedy this, the following research question is posed, where "participants" refer to those immigrants participating in this study:

RQ1: How did participants use Swedish news media during the election campaign?

Perceptions of News Media Among Immigrants

In terms of immigrants' perceptions of news media, research indicates that immigrants tend to be rather critical (Christiansen 2004), and it has been claimed that less positive perceptions might be explained by the fact that many immigrants previously have experienced media systems characterized by political propaganda (Weibull & Wadbring 1998). Research also suggests that immigrants are particularly critical of the way in which they are presented (Christiansen 2004). Specifically, immigrants have expressed that they experience that they are often linked to negativity and problems (Eide & Nikunen

2011; Christiansen 2011). Moreover, evidence from Denmark shows that immigrants perceive themselves as excluded in media (Christiansen 2004). Part of the explanation might be limited language skills and segregation (Christiansen 2004). Further, it is reasonable to expect that the feeling of exclusion, and the critical stance towards the news, relate to the fact that immigrants generally are underrepresented in news media (Eberl et al. 2018). Moreover, *when* they are figuring in the news, they tend to be linked to problems such as crime and cultural challenges (Andreassen 2011; Keskinen 2011; Schemer 2012; Strömbäck et al. 2017), although it might differ depending on immigrant group (Eberl et al. 2018; Lawlor & Tolley 2017) and between different media outlets (Eberl et al. 2018; Jacobs, Meeusen & d’Haenens 2016).

The problem-oriented media coverage might in turn lead to immigrants turning away from news in the host society (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). It is also reasonable to expect that underrepresentation and negative media frames might trigger mistrust, or even hostility, toward news media. Against this background, it could be hypothesized that immigrants in Sweden have rather negative perceptions of news media. Given the lack of previous research, I have however opted for two research questions about perceptions of Swedish news media during the election campaign rather than pose hypotheses:

RQ2: How did participants perceive Swedish news media during the election campaign in general?

RQ3: How did participants perceive the news coverage on immigration and immigrants during the election campaign?

Method

To investigate the research questions above, I have chosen focus groups interviews as methodology. Focus groups rely on the dynamic of group interaction to stimulate thinking and verbal contribution of participants to seek opinions and beliefs (Barron et al. 2010). It is a suitable method when the aim is to investigate peoples’ perceptions about their behavior (Ekström 2010) and their experience of media (Lindlof 2009). Focus groups are also increasingly used to access immigrants with limited language skills, that may exclude them from other research methods (Barron et al. 2010). Thus, it is a suitable method for exploring motivations behind media use as well as perceptions of news media among immigrants.

Six focus groups comprising between three and eight participants were conducted in the midst of the election campaign 2018.¹ Requirement of

1 The focus groups were conducted between August 28 and September 4. The election took place September 9.

participants, and the interviews, took place at locations that were familiar to participants. Specifically, four interviews were conducted at SFI (Swedish For Immigrants), and two interviews were conducted at a cultural center (Blå Stället), located in a suburb in Gothenburg. While the vast majority of the participants at SFI had immigrated to Sweden quite recently, most participants at Blå Stället had lived in Sweden a substantially longer time. This recruitment strategy was considered as beneficial, as it is reasonable to expect that residence time might influence how immigrants relate to Swedish media and the campaign.

Participants were asked if they wanted to take part in the focus groups. It should be noted that this self-selection has its shortcomings. For instance, individuals with good language skills and social capital might be more willing to participate: factors that are also associated with news use and political interest (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). Further, the self-selection led to some of the groups being quite heterogenous on factors such as age, education, ethnicity and gender, which might have implications on the group interaction. In some of the groups a few participants appeared to be more comfortable expressing their views than others, which might be related to the heterogeneity as well as the various group sizes. I handled this challenge by taking a rather active role as a moderator, ensuring that everyone had the chance to express their views.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish. To reduce the risk of selection bias due to language barriers, and to facilitate the communication process, participants were informed that they could answer in English, or mix Swedish and English, which some of them did.

A semi-structured interview guide designed to tap into the research questions about media use (RQ1) and perceptions of news media (RQ2 and RQ3) during the election campaign was used. A pilot test of the guide was firstly conducted together with a colleague. After debriefing and evaluating the test, no major changes were made. Thus, data from the pilot-group is also included in the study.

PARTICIPANTS

31 individuals participated in one of the six focus groups. Before the interviews, they filled in a short questionnaire about socio-demographics and media use, aiming to provide information about key characteristics of the sample. Data from the questionnaire (see Table 1) shows a great deal of variations among participants.

Table 1. Participants in Focus Groups: Demographics (individuals and percent)

	Participants (N, %)		Participants (N, %)
Gender		Years in Sweden	
Female	16 (52)	Less than 1 year– 2 years	13 (42)
Male	15 (48)	3–10 years	12 (39)
Age		More than 10 years	6 (19)
18–25 years	4 (13)	Media use for information about the election	
26–35 years	16 (53)	Newspapers	17 (55)
36–45 years	6 (19)	TV	16 (52)
46–55 years	5 (16)	Radio	11 (35)
Education		Social media	10 (32)
Primary	6 (19)	SVT	6 (19)
High school	8 (26)	Facebook	5 (16)
University/ collage	17 (17)	Göteborgs-Posten	4 (13)
Country of origin			
Australia	1 (3)		
Belarus	1 (3)		
Benin	1 (3)		
Croatia	2 (6)		
Egypt	1 (3)		
Greece	1 (3)		
Iran	5 (16)		
Iraq	8 (26)		
Morocco	1 (3)		
Palestine	1 (3)		
Romania	1 (3)		
Serbia	1 (3)		
Sierra Leone	1 (3)		
Somalia	3 (9)		
Syria	3 (9)		
The US	1 (3)		

Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers. The following open-ended question was asked for media use: “Which media do you use to get information about the Swedish election that will be held this autumn?” Since participants could mention several media types and outlets the percentages add up to more than 100. Some participants also mentioned more than one country of origin, which is why the percentages add up to more than 100. One participant was born in Sweden with parents who had immigrated. When recruiting participants at Blå Stället it was not clear that this participant was born in Sweden, which is why the person was included in one of the interviews. While the focus of the study is media use and perceptions among *immigrants*, the data that this participant contributed with was included since it enriches the findings.

This heterogenous sample is beneficial since many of the factors that participants differ on relate to media use and perceptions of media, and since the group *immigrants living in Sweden* is a highly diverse group. To increase the chances of mapping out various key explanations for media use and perceptions of news media, it is crucial to collect data from people with different characteristics. Worth noting however, while many different characteristics are represented, some are clearly overrepresented. For instance, 55 percent had a university or collage education and 53 percent were between 26–35 years. Yet, this is no major problem since the current study does not claim to *generalize* the results to the population *immigrants in Sweden*, but to *explore* media use and perceptions of news media among this group.

PROCEDURE

First, participants were welcomed and the intended focus group process was described.² It was stressed that the information participants would provide would be handled anonymously and only used for research purposes. Then, participants filled in the questionnaire, and thereafter they were asked to introduce themselves to the group. Then, the focus group interview started. The sessions were recorded and lasted approximately 40–70 minutes.

The interviews were then transcribed as detailed as possible to provide a transcript that was true to its original nature (Braun & Clarke 2006). The quotes presented in the result section below are thus close to direct translations of the transcript. Yet, minor changes (principally grammatical corrections) were made in cases where it was considered as necessary to facilitate reading and avoid potential misunderstandings.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The focus group data was analyzed with thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying and analyzing themes within data (Braun & Clarke 2006). A step-by-step-guide for thematic analysis was followed (Braun and Clarke 2006), and resulted in a thematic map with three themes relating to the research question about media use and four themes belonging to the research questions about media perceptions.³

To check the reliability of the coding, an intercoder-reliability test was conducted with an external coder (see e.g. Wibeck 2010). More specifically,

2 To enhance a friendly atmosphere, and to compensate participants for their contribution, participants were offered coffee, tea and snacks during the interviews.

3 Themes belonging to RQ1: 1) Media use and personal contacts as information sources, 2) Reasons for following the election campaign, 3) Reasons for not following the election campaign. Themes belonging to RQ2: 1) News media as provider of correct and truthful information, 2) News media as a watchdog, 3) News media and social responsibility. Themes belonging to RQ3: 1) News media coverage on immigrants and immigration.

10 percent of the material was randomly selected and then categorized under the themes based on the definitions of each theme. The test reached an agreement-rate of 85.7 percent, which is considered an acceptable rate (Wibeck 2010). After the test, the definition of one theme was further clarified, as the test revealed that two themes overlapped each other. Finally, and simultaneously as writing up the result section, the research questions were addressed by linking them to the analysis of the themes.

Findings

The result of the analysis is presented below. Each quote hyphen at the start of the sentence. To clarify when quotes belong to each other (i.e. participants engage in a group discussion), versus when the quotes represents an individual speaking, the focus group number is specified at the end of each speaking.

Use of News Media During the Election Campaign

MEDIA USE AND PERSONAL CONTACTS AS INFORMATION SOURCES

The first theme relating to RQ1 taps into participants' type of media use as well as the frequency of their media use. The other characteristic of this theme relates to participants' use of mediated information versus information from other sources.

In line with previous research suggesting that immigrants tend to seek news broadly (Christiansen 2004), participants described that they followed the campaign by using several different media types, including traditional media outlets, media content translated to their native language, social media, and alternative media sites. Interestingly, one participant expressed that low media trust served as a motivation for using several different media outlets:

- I do not trust media so I read several different newspapers so that I can cross... (Silence).
- So, you think that you can get a better picture if you use several different media? (Moderator).
- Yes, because no one knows if they say the truth. (FG6)

This can be related to research suggesting that immigrants tend to use news media broadly to fulfill their various needs (Christiansen 2004).

At the same time, many participants expressed that they relied on personal contacts – such as friends, family and colleagues – rather than media as sources of information about the election:

– I don't use media that much. But me and my husband have many Swedish friends. And we spend much time together, and I think I get the right information from them and not from media.

(FG2)

One participant elaborated on why personal contacts was preferred as an information source. The person expressed that the parents gave more information and provided pedagogical explanations, while news content was perceived as too short and difficult to follow:

– Yes, and they (refers to parents) can also explain in a good way and they say exactly what is happening. Sometimes in the news, they shorten everything. My parents give me more information.

(FG4)

Yet, mediated information and information through personal contacts sometimes overlapped:

– I don't check media or read the newspaper. But I listen to news on the radio when my stepdad drives me to school in the morning. So, I and he might discuss who we will vote for and why and stuff like that.

(FG4)

Further, friends and families living in other countries also linked participants to mediated information, by sharing or talking about news content on Swedish politics. A reoccurring pattern was that the news coverage from other countries was about immigration, integration and/or the Sweden Democrats:

– Yes, but I received an e-mail from a friend several weeks ago about Sweden's political situation. So, it's, yes, I think people hear about it in different parts of the world actually. It's a little strange that my friends know about it...I think it's a little negative for people living in Sweden. (Silence)

– Okay, so it's not positive information? (Moderator)

– No, people just want to hear about the Sweden Democrats. And what's going to happen with us who are immigrants. So, it becomes a little uncomfortable.

(FG1)

While some participants stated that they followed media coverage about the election and other expressed that personal contacts were a more central information source, other participants said that they neither used media nor talked politics during the election campaign:

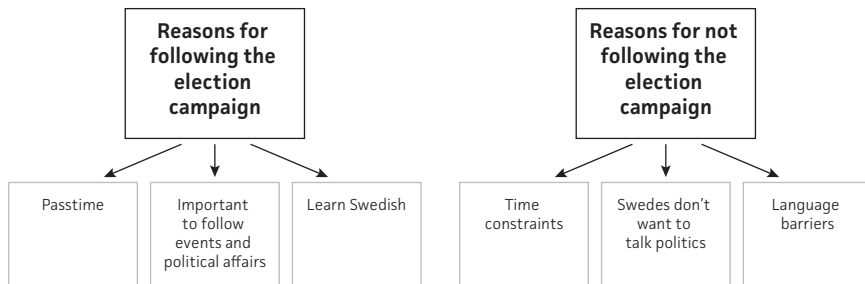
– I'm in the same kind of situation as you (refers to another participant). Everything I see comes from my home country and I don't talk politics often with people...So, I haven't heard or read much about the election actually.

(FG1)

REASONS FOR FOLLOWING AND NOT FOLLOWING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Participants elaborated on why they followed, or not followed, the campaign. Thus, the other two themes that were identified in relation to RQ₁ are 1) Reasons for following the election campaign and 2) Reasons for not following the election campaign. The identified motivations for following and not following the election campaign are illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1. Reasons for Following Versus not Following the Election Campaign



Starting with reasons for following the election campaign, participants expressed that they felt that it was important to stay updated on current events and political affairs:

- For example, I read Aftonbladet (Swedish tabloid) almost every day. Not every day, every second day. I want to know what happens.
(FG₃)

This is consistent with uses and gratification research, showing that media use can be motivated by a need to be informed and learn about one's community, events and political affairs (Rubin 2009; Ruggiero 2000), as well as research that have identified this as one of the motivations for media use among immigrants (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Sjöberg & Rydin 2011). Beyond that, different dimensions of the need to stay updated on events and politics can be distinguished: for instance, to be able to be a part of a social context or to manage everyday life (Bergström 2016). When analyzing the focus group data, another dimension could also be identified: one participant felt that it was highly important to follow the radical right movement in Sweden to increase the chances of being able to predict potential implications of a strong radical right, and in particular how it would impact the person as a refugee. That can be related to research suggesting that individuals under stressful situations might be more attached to media (Ruggiero 2000), as well as the suggestion that media use is related to social identity (Rubin 2009):

– I always read newspapers and interviews about the election and uh...And I want to know how the Swedes will vote and what will be the next government, to know what to do...as refugees. What to do in the future. Yes, because there are two different ways. If negative people will form a government...or those who think that all refugees should leave Sweden and have a bad program for refugees, so...I try to figure out what to do as a second step. So therefore, I listen to everyone and read everything about the election. And I always ask all Swedes “Who are you going to vote for?”
(FG6)

This motivation appeared crucial to the participant who developed the thoughts and feelings later during the interview:

– For, example I “liked” Alternativ För Sverige⁴ on Facebook two days ago, and I follow them and what they are talking about. They want Sweden to only be for those who have blue eyes, yellow hair and white skin. They don’t want any others.

– Why do you follow them? (Moderator)

– Because I want to try to know how they think. And how many people agree with them. It’s very important to me. To know how many Swedish people’ agree with those who are Nazi or racist in this country. It’s really important to me.

– But isn’t it very difficult to read such things for you as an immigrant?
(Moderator)

– Yes, it’s very difficult. You feel really bad and you get very sad when you read how they talk about the others.
(FG6)

This illustrates how the different situation that immigrants and native-born are situated in, and how immigrants’ transnational situation can influence their news media use (Christiansen 2004). Nevertheless, there are also some motivations that are quite similar regardless of whether people are native born or immigrations. This includes using media and following the election campaign as a way of just passing time:

– I usually check... At the bus stops, there is information about each party. What they think about, and what suggestions they have and so on. I usually read to get information. Yes, and it shortens time. (Laugh)
(FG4)

This finding is consistent with research showing that accessing news often function as a habitual way of consuming time rather than seeking media content for

4 Alternativ för Sverige (ENG: Alternative for Sweden) is a Swedish radical right and anti-immigration party.

goal-directed and instrumental reasons (Rubin 2009; Ruggiero 2000). Further, in line with previous research (Sjöberg & Rydin 2011), it was expressed that the election campaign was followed for the sake of learning Swedish:

- But my reason is not politics. I listen to learn more Swedish.
(FG1)

Turning to the reasons for *not* following the campaign, some participants expressed that there are language barriers:

- There are many immigrants in Sweden now. So maybe there could be a little more news in different languages.
- Yeah, I agree.
- It's a little controversial but I think they could be a little more inclusive. Especially, in the large cities like Gothenburg and Malmö. Because not everyone can speak Swedish. It's not easy.
- Yes. Because I know very little about certain parties. But I think it's a good idea. Because as we can see, we can't have a discussion in Swedish about this stuff because it's waaay higher than our... We want to get our point across so it would be good if it was in different languages.
(FG1)

This is in line with research showing that immigrants, compared to people born in Sweden, find it more difficult to read news stories and understand news programs on the radio as well as on TV (Annerstedt, Bergström & Ohlsson 2017), as well as research showing that language skills is important for media use (Christiansen 2004).

Research on news avoidance suggests that a common motivation for non-use is that people experience that they do not have the time to consume news (Schróder 2016). Time constraint also occurred as an explanation for not following the campaign and politics during the focus groups:

- I don't know if I will vote. It's the first time but I'm not so focused on politics so I don't know. Because I'm more focused on my job, but maybe I will vote.
(FG1)

Finally, one participant felt that Swedes don't want to talk about politics:

- It's like a rule in Sweden, that people can't talk politics at the lunch-table or... Yes, if you check the statistics, the Sweden Democrats have 24 percent. This means that one of four will vote for them. So, when people sit around a table, there are several who will vote for them. But they don't want to talk about it so it's a bit fake. Because I work at a Swedish company and there are many Swedes who find it uncomfortable to talk about it during the lunch break.
(FG1)

Perceptions of News Media During the Election Campaign: Different Dimensions of Media Trust

With respect to RQ2 and RQ3 about participants' perceptions of news media, different dimensions of media trust became central during the interviews. It comes as no surprise as media trust has been shown to be crucial for understanding people's perceptions of media (e.g. Jensen & Rosengren 1990; Sullivan 2013; McLeod et al. 2017). The concept of media trust represents faith in media actors to fulfil journalistic expectations that people have (Vanacker & Belmas 2009). Put differently, media trust to a high degree depends on peoples' perceptions about media actors' performance, and peoples' evaluations and perceptions of media are based on their normative expectations (Fawzi 2018). Consistent with this, participants evaluated media based on their perceptions about how media and journalists fulfilled the normative expectations that participants had. Specifically, four themes that represented different trust dimensions, could be distinguished: 1) News media as provider of correct and truthful information, 2) News media and social responsibility 3) News media as a watchdog, and 4) News media coverage on immigrants and immigration. In other words, participants evaluated media based on these themes. The themes, as well as positive and negative perceptions expressed by participants, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Different Dimensions of Media Trust

Theme/ trust dimension	Positive perceptions	Negative perceptions
News media as provider of correct and truthful information	<p>"Swedish media represent citizens rather than the government."</p> <p>"Swedish media is free and independent."</p>	<p>"Media content is influenced by political parties, economic factors, journalists and owners of the companies."</p> <p>"Media spread false information."</p>
News media and social responsibility	<p>"There is information that is easy to understand."</p> <p>"There are several outlets to choose from."</p> <p>"Swedish media outlets are serious and classy."</p>	<p>"There is a lack of information that is easy to understand."</p> <p>"News media are shallow and repetitive."</p>
News media as a watchdog	<p>"Certain media outlets scrutinize and have the courage to ask uncomfortable questions."</p>	<p>"In general, media do not scrutinize and ask uncomfortable questions."</p>
News media coverage on immigrants and immigration	<p>"It is understandable that news media report about immigration since it's a central societal problem."</p>	<p>"News coverage about immigration and immigrants is one-sided and negative."</p>

NEWS MEDIA AS PROVIDER OF CORRECT AND TRUTHFUL INFORMATION

To provide information that is as truthful as possible is a key task for journalism (Strömbäck 2004). While participants in the focus groups appeared to agree on the ideal, there were different opinions about whether this ideal is adhered to or not. One positive claim that was being made is that Swedish media is free and independent. Participants referred to, and compared with, media in their home countries, and felt that news media in Sweden is more reliable:

- Yes, here, TV outlets in Sweden, they work independently. For example, no police appear. There, (refers to home country) comes the police to the TV-company and says: "Stand there, say this!" and so on.
(FG2)

Moreover, and in contrast to research suggesting that news media focus on views of elites (Curran et al. 2014), participants felt that news media represent citizens to a greater deal than in many other countries:

- I think that here in Sweden they say more what people think. Not only what the government is thinking.
- Yes, it's better.
- It's a little more freedom than in our countries.
- Yes, it's a big, big, big difference. It's not comparable.
(FG2)

On the other hand, many participants felt that they did not trust Swedish media content. One argument was that, rather than fulfilling the journalistic ideal about being free and autonomous in relation to interests of other powerful actors and institutions, news media was perceived to be influenced by political parties:

- And also, for example, one wants to promote certain parties. So, some parties might pay certain companies to spread specific things about the party.
- Mm.
- Then you can't trust it. If money is involved you can't trust it.
- Do you mean ads from political parties in media? (Moderator)
- I think that they also pay newspapers to promote their party.
- In articles and so on? (Moderator)
- Yes.
(FG3)

Worth noting however is that the perceptions that some participants appeared to be based on previous experiences with media from their home country, rather than on their experiences of Swedish news media:

– You have to be careful when reading all newspapers because there are many media outlets that promote those who pay more. For example, there is a party called Alternativ för Sverige. That party can go to some newspapers and pay them to write: “We are good for Sweden. We do that. It’s a good thing.” And they’re talking about them and try to get many votes from those who don’t know anything about the party.

– Yes, maybe they get paid from parties. It happens in many countries, so why not in Sweden as well? Because of money...

(FG6)

This can be related to claims about that immigrants might have less positive perceptions about news media since many of them have experienced media systems characterized by political propaganda (Weibull & Wadbring 1998). Further, news media outlets were not only presumed to be influenced by political parties, but economic factors in general, which seemed to decrease trust:

– I want to add one thing: For example, Aftonbladet and Expressen and all this – they want to make money. It’s their purpose. So, it’s not for the sake of the people, but for the sake of the company.

– Exactly.

– So, they can put a really interesting title like: “This has happened.” But it’s just to attract readers.

(FG3)

Another reason for not trusting the media, that some participants raised, is that the news coverage might be influenced by the predispositions of journalists or the owners of the media companies:

– If an enterprise is privately owned it can be manipulated. And a certain viewpoint can be expressed on the television and in the newspapers. And it’s difficult for me to say. Because I don’t know how Sweden is run. I’m not sure if it’s a public TV so therefore technically no one owns the right to it, or whether it’s private and the current government showing this story or they showing that story and try to influence whether it be consciously or unconsciously. So, I think we are misinformed.

(FG1)

– You cannot know for sure who provides you the information. For example, if you are a journalist, you might only write what you want. Because you have the same thinking. It’s a part of the job as a journalist. I don’t know, but it happens very often in my country.

(FG1)

Once again, it can be noted that perceptions often seemed to be influenced by experiences from the countries that participants had emigrated from. Further, some participants explicitly expressed that media spread misinformation, although participants often stated that they were not always sure about the Swedish case:

– They can do whatever they want. It's kind of fake news. You can't believe what you read or what you see on TV. But I'm not sure how it works in Sweden...

(FG1)

– I think there's a lot of media propaganda. They are stating certain things: "This party said that." But if you think and check the source, you can see that it's not truth. In the past, it was more true information that was being spread, not false rumors. And therefore, I don't think that the media has helped at all when it comes to the election.

(FG3)

NEWS MEDIA AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Consistent with the ideal that news media should act as a "public educator", contributing to the common good (Bondebjerg 2002; Ekström & Djerf-Pierre 2013; Norris 2000; Strömbäck 2004), participants expressed an ideal that the news media should take social responsibility, for instance by providing content that is easy to understand:

– Language and summary. The journalists, the media: they have to write at a level that everyone can understand. I don't need a journalist to write advanced. I have to look for synonyms and check "what does this mean". I mean, maybe it can be easier for those who have college education. They can understand the content and summarize. But another...Media must speak to different language levels...People, everyone will not have...We are all different, we have different jobs, we are different when we read articles.

(FG3)

While some participants expressed that media actors could do better to fulfill this expectation, other mentioned media outlets that they thought are easy to understand and related to this also felt that there are a lot of outlets to choose from:

– In class we read 8 sidor: information that is really easy to understand.

(FG5)

– I think that here in Sweden it's very interesting when you are interested in politics. You can find any kind of information, for example by checking apps, listening to radio or watching TV. And you decide for yourself. If you don't want to hear anything about politics, that's okay. So, it's really interesting.

(FG5)

Another aspect related to the theme of social responsibility can be related to research showing that news media often frame politics as a strategic game rather than as issues, and that this type of framing tend to increase distrust in politics as well as in news media themselves (Curran et al. 2014; Hopmann et al. 2015). Related to this, participants felt that the content in certain media outlets are shallow and repetitive rather than that they provide in-depth information:

– It goes fast. And they don't raise important issues. For example, they made a contest with the party leaders. And yes, I think it's good but there are a lot of important questions that people are waiting to be answered.

(FG3)

– And there is one problem I think they should work on: They always talk about the same thing. They are not trying to find anything else...on the news, on SVT, every morning it's the same story. It's boring. I think people get bored and tired of the same old story all the time. Maybe another program is better, but I watch SVT every morning. But they are not talking so well... Or they have to change subjects.

– What subjects do you think they talk too much about for example?
(Moderator)

– They talk every morning about that you have to...they don't say it's mandatory, but you have to vote. And Stefan Löfven... He is always on top of the news stories. And they always talk about him and that he avoids the answer...Why do they want to talk about that all the time? It's enough to say it once. Why do they have to repeat?

(FG5)

Yet, participants in the same focus groups also expressed positive opinions about Swedish media content:

– As you said, it's boring that they talk about the same thing all the time. But for me that's better than that they have scandals all the time.

– Yes, I think they are a little more classy here, and a little more serious.

(FG5)

NEWS MEDIA AS A WATCHDOG

One of the most cherished journalistic ideals is the ideal of scrutinizing and act as a watchdog (Norris 2000; Strömbäck 2004). In principally one of the focus groups, this was elaborated upon and participants thought that media could do better to fulfill this ideal:

– Media must look for the truth and present it to the people...For example, ask why people vote for the Swedish Democrats...Even though the best colleague might have immigrant background for example. The media has a task

here, to reveal this, tell the truth, and ask this person: “Why do you vote for this party? Don’t hide, but say why.”
(FG3)

However, participants also gave examples of specific media outlets that they thought performed well:

- For example, on SVT...This program where they go and film...
- Uppdrag Granskning! (Two other participants)
- Mm, actually I like that. I like that. Because I feel: “Okay, this is facts.” They dare to take this step and even if there are people saying: “You should not say that” and they get these threats. But still. It becomes interesting and you sit and watch it.”
(FG3)

NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE ON IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION

Turning to the theme related to perceptions of the news media coverage of immigrants and immigration, participants in the focus groups expressed that they felt that the news coverage about immigration and immigrants tend to be one-sided and focusing on negative aspects (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Christiansen 2011; Horsti 2008). The fact that participants expressed negative opinions about news content about immigration is consistent with research showing that trust in news coverage is lower regarding this topic compared to many other topics (Andersson et al., 2017). Yet, research has also shown that many people think that media avoid reporting about negative consequences of immigration (Andersson et al. 2017), while participants in the focus groups rather expressed the opposite view:

- Media must tell people the truth. Why are immigrants here? But instead many report about car fires in Biskopsgården. Or crime in Angered. Or terrorism in Stockholm. But think about the reason people move to Sweden. There are many people who still don’t understand it. Media must inform people before they choose racist parties.
(FG2)

Yet, some participants thought that immigration is a central problem, and said that they thus understood why media pay much attention to it:

- There are always problems with taxes, health care, education and other things. But now, one of the most important problems is immigration.
- Yes.
- And that’s why they talk a lot about it. Other things are also important but they are always important. But today they have to think about immigration.

– I also think they talk about it so much because everybody has an opinion about that. For example, this Green Party...there are people who are not interested in the environment. Or if I don't have my grandparents here, I don't care so much about elderly care and stuff like that. But when it comes to immigration everybody has an opinion.

– Yes, because it's a big big change for Swedish society. And I understand why it's a big question. Because now we have to let those people in to society. Because we have so many different cultures.

(FG5)

Overall, however, most participants seemed to think that the coverage on immigration and immigrants was biased:

– They just focus on the negative implications. But if you think about the economy, immigration will be a good thing for Sweden...I know that there are problems. But there are also positive things, such as the economy.

(FG2)

– Maybe media should write more about positive things about immigrants, their homelands and habits. And maybe portray them as normal persons that you don't have to be afraid of.

(FG2)

Discussion

To summarize the findings of this study, the focus group data firstly displayed a high degree of variation regarding which media was used, the frequency of participants' media use, as well as their reasons for following – or not following – the election campaign. While the need to stay updated on political events was central for some participants, other viewed it as a way of learning Swedish. This coincide with previous research that also have identified these motivations (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Sjöberg & Rydin 2011). Further, some expressed that following the mediated election campaign was rather a pastime.

In line with previous research, participants mentioned language barriers as one reasons for *not* following the election campaign (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). Moreover, time constraint and the impression that Swedes do not want to talk politics were also mentioned as explanations.

In terms of their perceptions of news media, participants differed. While some appeared to have overall positive views, others were substantially more critical. In other words, negative as well as positive evaluations about how well media actors fulfilled participants' normative expectations were represented. However, it should be noted that the negative evaluations were more central and often characterized by a longer, more developed reasoning, illustrated with concrete examples and experiences. This is consistent with research suggesting

that immigrants tend to be rather critical toward media (Christiansen 2004). One key part of the explanation is probably the generally problem-oriented news coverage on immigration related issues (Eberl et al. 2018; Strömbäck et al. 2017). Further, the fact that participants often linked negative perceptions to experiences of media in their home countries indicates that experiences of media systems characterized by political propaganda might have generated suspiciousness toward Swedish news media as well (Weibull & Wadbring 1998).

Worth noting, many participants who expressed negative perceptions and mistrust toward Swedish news media still used it. That might seem contradictory – why would people use media that they do not consider to be trustworthy? While research suggests that the most skeptical people use slightly less traditional media, they still get much of their information from the media sources they mistrust (Tsfati & Cappella 2003). This might be explained by the fact that news can be used to fulfil different needs, such as entertainment, pastime or means of connecting to society (Tsfati & Cappella 2003).

Although I believe that this study makes an important contribution by providing insights into media use and perceptions of news media among immigrants during the election campaign, one shortcoming is that the findings cannot be generalized to the population *immigrants living in Sweden*. Thus, while the negative evaluations of news media were more central and often characterized by longer and more developed explanations, this is not necessarily the case for immigrants living the Sweden in general. Consequently, an important task for future research would be to investigate how common negative and positive perceptions of news media are among immigrants on the aggregate level. This could be done by measuring the four different trust dimensions that participants in this study based their perceptions on. It would also be interesting to test if news media stimulate political engagement (in line with virtuous circle theories) or rather turn immigrants of politics and the election campaign (in line with media malaise theories).

The qualitative approach of this study also limits the possibilities to map out key factors leading to the identified variations between participants. Thus, future and quantitative studies should test if individual-level factors that are important for political interest, news use and trust – such as education – might explain individual-level variations in media use and perceptions. Further, language skills, social capital and self-esteem might also explain the variation in media use and perceptions, as these factors in other countries have been associated with among immigrants (after media use) (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). Additionally, it should be investigated if the fact that media tend to portray different immigrant groups in different ways (Eberl et al. 2018), is likely to lead to different perceptions about news media among different immigrant groups.

Finally, another relevant task for future research might be to investigate how media use and perceptions of news media among immigrants develop over

time. For example, research shows that the level of social trust among immigrants tend to increase over time (Holmberg & Rothstein 2014; Nannestad et al. 2014), and it is plausible that a similar type of process might be at work with respect to media use and media perceptions – including media trust.

Thus, further research on how immigrants use and perceive news media is clearly needed. Since media use and perceptions of news media appear to be crucial for a healthy democracy and thus have societal implications, and as Sweden is populated by many people from other countries, this is a research-topic with high societal relevance. Thus, it is my hope that the current study will serve as a springboard for more research about media use and perceptions of news media among immigrants.

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